Makers of Indian Literature

# Bhima Bhoi

## Sitakant Mahapatra

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**Bhima Bhoi** (ca. 1855-94), a Kondh tribal poet of Orissa, has been hailed as a seer and visionary. Exponent of the Mahima or Alekha cult, he has woven philosophical and metaphysical ideas in simple, lyrical Oriya poetry. His *bhajans* and *bolis* are on the lips of millions and are sung to the accompaniment of castanets and tambourine in the villages of Orissa. Though the contrast of conflicting concepts and situations, his images and metaphors build an eerie and poignant poetic landscape trees flower but have no shade; flowers not only have colour but also poison in them; rivers swell and surge and meteors shoot down to the earth; there is sea without water; dance to inaudible music; exotic bees of the spirit seek the nectar of realisation, reaching a stage of the language where ornamentation is inappropriate and rhetoric out of place.

Folk idiom and colloquial speech make his language earthy, vibrating with intense emotion, ranging from insistent supplication to righteous anger, and from abject surrender to indignant moral assertion. Bhima Bhoi's contribution to the making of Oriya literature is unparalleled.

**Sitakant Mahapatra (b.1937)** holds a Doctorate in Social Anthropology. After two years of University teaching, he joined the Indian Administrative Service in 1961 and has also held the posts of Secretary, Culture; Secretary, Official Languages; and Chairman, National Book Trust. He has been a fellow in the world's two premier Universities, namely Cambridge & Harvard. He has also been a Homi Bhabha fellow for 4 years. He has published 21 anthologies of poems, 9 collections of essays on literature and culture and 4 travelogues. He has translated and edited 10 anthologies of the Oral Poetry of Indian Tribes. Anthologies of his poems have been translated into major European languages and also into Arabic, Hebrew, Chinese and Japanese . Winner of several awards including Sahitya Akademi Award, Bharatiya Jnanpith Award, Sarala Award, Gangadhar Meher National Award, Kabir Samman, Soviet Land Nehru Award & Kumaran Asan Poetry Award, he is an elected Fellow of the Sahitya Akademi.

*Line drawing: Pramod Ganapatye*

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BHIMA BHOI

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodhana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A. D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi

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Sitakant Mahapatra

SAHITYA AKADEMI

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# 1

# Outlines of a Little-known Life

Historical records do not tell us much about the exact date of his birth, nor the full or detailed outlines of his life and whether he was blind from childhood or not. As a matter of fact the exact date and place of Bhima Bhoi's birth is still shrouded in uncertainty. There are more of legends concerning these than accurate, historically verifiable or determined facts. According to some scholars he was born in Sambalpur district, in a village called Kankadapara near the sub-divisional headquarter Rairakhol, in a poor Kondh family sometime in the middle of the 19th century. There is a legend that a Kondh couple named Danra and Gurubari picked up an orphan boy from the forest and named him Bhima Bhoi. Professor N.N.Basu, in his *Modern Buddhism and its followers in Orissa,* says that Bhima Bhoi was born in a village called Joranda in the Dhenkanal ex-State and that his name was Bhima Sen Bhoi Arakhita Das and he was blind from birth. There has been a lot of controversy as to whether he was at all blind or was blind from birth or lost his eyesight by some unfortunate accident in early youth. The latter hypothesis has been accepted by Sri B.C. Mazumdar. Pandit Binayak Mishra is also of the same view. Prof. Artaballav Mohanty, in his preface to *Stuti Chintamoni,*

quotes earlier literature such as Shyamaghana's *Alekha Malika,* Achyutananda's *Mahasunya Samhita, Kalpa Samhita, Nirguna Samhita,* Jasobanta's *Malika* and Sridhara's *Siddha Chandrika* to justify his argument that Bhima was *doubtlessly* blind from birth.

Legend has it that once Mahima Swami and his disciple Siddha Govind Baba came to Bhima's village at midnight and called him out. Bhima was surprised and wanted to know who they were. He was told that because of the good deeds of his previous birth both of them had come to him. Bhima said, "If you have come to bless me let me be able to see you." And then he could see. He came out and saw the two seers standing outside the house like "Sun and Moon". Mahima Swami blessed him and said that he had a pre-ordained role to play in the propagation of the tenets of Mahima cult in this century. Mahima Swami blessed him to have the intense power of poetic vision. Bhima prayed to him: "O Lord, with the power of vision you gave me I have seen your divine feet but I don't want to see all the dirt in this world. Bless me that the outside world remains invisible to me." The Swami blessed him saying: "Let your inner eyes open and the external eyes close as before." Bhima again went blind. This is recounted by Biswanath Baba in his *Satyamahima Dharma Itihas.* Bhima has referred perhaps to this incident in the first chapter of *Nirveda Sadhana:* "I woke up immediately and found by my side the *sunya brahma;* when I wiped my eyes and looked again there they were, the guru and the disciple. I fell prostrate at their feet and they blessed me."

In his poems there are references to the fact that when he was only four-year old, he saw a wandering yogi with the divine signs of conch and discus on his arms. This yogi had come begging for alms in his village. It is likely that this was one of the visions of his childhood and the yogi was none other than his great guru, Mahima Gosain, to whom he dedicates many of his *bhajans* and

poems. It can be argued, as indeed it has been, that the use of the word "saw" is metaphorical and not physical. In other words this was merely a vision, the dawn of a kind of spiritual awareness which lifted the cloud of unknowing. Maybe this is what made him a seer. It is true that in his poetry there is not very much of physical landscape. Often it is a landscape of an inner world shimmering with unseen lights, realities and presences. They look mostly like the result of a deep meditative and intuitive awareness. But there are also many intimate references to the activities of human life, the innocent childhood, the coming of youth whose passionate energy sometimes makes one forget life's true objectives and run after mirages of love and sex and then at the end of the day a realisation of what one has wasted. The descriptions relating to the periods of human life, their tragedies and triumphs, their sensuousness and living warmth speak of an intense realisation and not gratuitous knowledge. In this context, B.C. Mazumdar's opinion is also relevant and may be quoted in extenso as it throws light on certain important aspects of his life:

"My report regarding him, as has been published in the District Gazetteer of Sambalpur, stands in need of correction in one point of importance. I can assert on the strength of some internal evidence collected from his writings, that he was not born blind, but became blind during the early years of his youth. Evidently he learnt how to read and write in his childhood, but acquired knowledge of old time Oriya Literature by merely listening to the recitation of the books in the Bhagabata Houses of Orissa. He was exceptionally intelligent and singularly receptive to new ideas; he heard Jagannath Das's Bhagabata and other Puranas recited in many Hindu villages, and what he thus heard, he retained in his wonderfully powerful memory. Once he came in contact with some itinerant Kumbhipatia preachers and got himself interested in this new creed. He went to Dhenkanal to meet the

Guru of the sect and there he became a disciple of the Guru. Subsequently, he modified the tenets of the Kumbhipatias and became himself the Guru of a new form of Alekha religion. It is a phenomenon of great significance that Bhima Bhoi who was a blind low-caste Kondh became the progenitor of a religious system, which disowns caste system and idolatry. His principal seat was in the Feudatory State of Sonepur, where a large number of his followers assembled to hear him preach his doctrines. Some learned Brahmans became his disciples, renouncing the caste system and these Brahmans were specially employed in writing to dictation what Bhima Bhoi preached in impromptu verses."

Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha in his *History of Oriya Literature* maintains that Bhima lost his eye-sight in his early childhood and this was perhaps due to a virulent attack of smallpox. The eminent critic Chittaranjan Das also shares this view in his well-known work *Odisara Mahima Dhanna.* The greatest living authority and propounder of Satya Mahima Dharma, Sri Biswanath Baba has also mentioned at different points of his writing that Bhima the poet-composer was in fact blind. From this it would appear that a host of critics and historians of literature are agreed that Bhima was either blind from his birth or lost his eyesight either in early childhood or early youth. This would lead to the further conclusion that he had read very little of traditional Oriya literature or Sanskrit literature; that his compositions were dictated by him orally and taken down by his disciples. And above all it would also heighten the role of divine inspiration as a result of his conversion to Satya Mahima Dharma.

It is indeed a pity that Bhima Bhoi has left behind no portrait or photograph of his own nor has any contemporary friend, fellow-writer or disciple has written about it.

The young and ardent Bhima Bhoi scholar Bhagirathi Nepak has sought to analyse the internal evidence in Bhima Bhoi's writings and is of the view that he was not blind. He rightly asserts that whereas in *Stuti Chintamoni* Bhima refers to so many aspects of his life and times nowhere does he say definitely that he was blind or that he became blind. In *Stuti Chintamoni* there are passages such as these: "Daily I used to tend cattle in the forest. When hungry and thirsty I used to drink water from the hill-streams. *Looking at the sky* often I used to hesitate whether it is time to go back and whether some gruel would be in my luck today." As Sri Nepak asserts it would indeed be difficult for a blind boy to tend cattle in the forest and do all that is narrated above.

Besides he quotes the following from Bhima's writings:

> Howsoever much I write, the story of this world does not end. Holding the palm-leaf and the stylus how many more *Pothis* am I going to compose?
>
> *(Stuti Chintamoni*—21st Boli)

> Hurriedly I compose these lines, looking neither forward nor backward and I write them on palm-leaf.
>
> (Cautisa)

> You would be knowing all my hapless condition and in all my scribbling I beseech the grace of your feet....
>
> (Cautisa)

These three extracts, Sri Nepak rightly asserts, make it evident that he did write himself on palm-leaf with an iron stylus as was the prevailing practice of the times. Further, Bhima refers to his own seeing and with his own eyes more than once in *Stuti Chintamoni* and in his *bhajans*. In one of his celebrated bhajans he says:

> When you see that one and single Brahma you may even go blind. What I have seen I can barely describe.

And in the fifty-ninth *boli* of *Stuti Chintamoni,* he says:

> Seeing with my own eyes I again forget and am overtaken by nescience... and I am stricken with fear by the world. I beseech your grace as I roam around *like a blind man.*

It is unlikely that a blind person would refer to himself in this fashion. In the twenty-sixth *boli* of *Stuti Chintamoni* when he is full of righteous anger against the degeneration of the contemporary society he says:

> To my eyes the fifty-six crores of living beings look like strands of straw. I could in a moment overturn this world but my Guru has not commanded me...

Elsewhere he blames himself how he is "cutting out his own tongue and piercing a stick into his own eyes. In a *cautisa,* apparently composed after the demise of Mahima Gosain he says how he can never forget what he has been and how everything now looks ugly and desolate after his (Mahima Gosain's) departure." To sum up, from all the internal evidence available in Bhima Bhoi's writing, it seems more reasonable to assume that he was not blind from birth as was assumed by Artaballav Mohanty and a host of other scholars and critics after him. When there is so much of biographical and personal references in *Stuti Chintamoni* it is very unlikely that an articulate author like Bhima would not have made a reference to his own blindness somewhere and would not have regretted or lamented it. On the other hand there are several references like those quoted, which would make it appear that he was not blind.

Sri Nepak feels that the spokesmen of the Mahima Dharma and Alekha cult have also either made it out that Bhima was blind

or have accepted this facile explanation for the reason that it would heighten the impact of religious inspiration and divine grace in Bhima's life. It would prove that even a blind Kondh could compose and dictate all the wonderful verses that he did by the grace and inspiration of his Guru Mahima Gosain. It is true in every religion and religious faith there is an overt or hidden emphasis on supernaturalism and the supernatural powers which one inherits when one is a strong believer in the faith. It is not unlikely that such a motive has worked in this case. To conclude it would be more reasonable to assume that Bhima was not blind from birth though he had a very unhappy childhood as a destitute and poor boy tending cattle and somehow making a living.

It may be noted that there are no Kondh settlements in and around village Joranda in Dhenkanal district nor is there any evidence of such settlements being there by the middle of the 19th century in contemporaneous historical records. In his preface to *Stuti Chintamoni,* Prof. Artaballav Mohanty writes that Bhima Bhoi was born around A.D. 1855 near Rairakhol. Pandit Binayak Mishra thinks that Bhima Bhoi was born in 1860 and died in 1895. From Bhima Bhoi's *bhajans* it can be gathered that he was born as ordained by his guru Mahima Gosain, and blessed with the divine powers of Mahima Gosain, he acquired the ability to compose poetry and his numerous *stutis, bhajans* and *jananas* and thereby could popularise Satya Mahima Dharma. There are many references to this fact in Bhima Bhoi's *bhajans.* This is what B.C. Mazumdar has to say in his *Typical Selections from Oriya Literature:* "Bhima Bhoi was born in a poor Kondh family in the feudatory State of Rairakhol, not earlier than 1855, for when he died at Khaliapali in the Sonepur State in 1895, he was, as I estimate, on the sunny side of forty. I need not remind the readers that the Kondhs are aboriginal people and live in tracts where the

influence of the Hindus cannot reach. Bhima Bhoi as an Oriya Kondh was engaged in his childhood in tending cattle."

Without entering into these arid controversies which anyway are theoretical and in no way add to the proper appreciation or enjoyment of his poetry we may make certain broad assumptions on this score. For example, it is now reasonably certain that Bhima Bhoi was born sometime between 1846 and 1850 and expired in 1895. It is also more or less certain that he was born in a village near Rairakhol, a sub-divisional town in Sambalpur district. Apparently he was a posthumous child and his own life-span was also short, i.e., about forty-five to fifty years. In his *Stuti Chintamoni* there are poignant references to the memory of his childhood days, its sorrows and sufferings, its aimless wanderings and privations.

It appears Bhima Bhoi earned his living up to the age of twelve by tending cattle of a rich person of his village. This was, however, not to be for long. He records his experiences as an orphan boy in *Stuti Chintamoni's* 21st and 22nd *bolis* or cantos in the following words;

> O Lord from my childhood I have known the intensity of my misery. Thinking of it in the lotus of my heart I have not been blessed with happiness even for a moment. From my birth I am hapless. My parents left me in this world alone. If I crave for a happy meal or pleasure wherefrom can I ever get it ?
>
> It is not tears but blood that used to trickle down as I have wiped them. None other than Sriguru knows what miseries I have gone through.
>
> When I completed the age of four, once in the month of *jyestha* a wandering yogi dressed in loin-cloth of ochre colour came to the village. In both his hands I have clearly noticed the symbols of conch and the wheel.

He led a lonely and desolate life. It is possible he took to oral compositions and was used to singing them at this period of his life. The young critic Sri Nepak feels that many poems of *Cautisa Madhuchakra* and the well-known *Cautisa Rasara Keli* were composed by Bhima before his conversion to Mahima cult. They have a racy folk-idiom and contain uninhibited description of physical enjoyment. In these poems Radha's craving for Krishna is delineated through intense desire for union with all its intimate details.

It would be proper to assume that Bhima had a talent for poetry and a command over the local tradition and the idiom and language of the local tribal and non-tribal people even before his conversion to Mahima cult. This conversion, no doubt, led to an even greater range of ideas and themes and helped extend the horizons of his poetic vision and compositions. He had elements of a pastoral poet in him and was thoroughly conversant with the life-styles and hopes and aspirations of the local people.

He had suffered intensely and learnt more in the school of life than from any books. In any case, he had no formal schooling. During his sojourns he had been humiliated by the Caste Hindus, castigated, derided and even physically assaulted. In his *cautisas* there are references to his being tied up in ropes, physically assaulted and insulted. In all these trying circumstances, he sought the blessings of Mahima Gosain.

The imprint of these sad experiences can be seen in his writings. Bhima Bhoi the saint-poet does sometimes speak in the voice of a revolutionary. It is, however, the voice of a revolutionary who is intensely concerned with the redemption of society and the welfare of all. The revolt is not against any class or caste. Nor is it against any group or religious sect. It is primarily against the decay of moral values, personal honesty and in favour of deep sense of ethical norms. The immense courage and confidence his

poems breathe can come only from someone honestly wedded to the welfare of mankind as a whole. Sometimes in his writings he gets into intense emotional moods and accuses society for its degeneration. Rhetoric becomes the natural outlet in such situations but it does not spoil his poetic dream which still glows with love and compassion. A true revolutionary is one who is also an intense lover of man.

He has seen tragedy, suffering, exploitation, idolatry and various levels of social decay. His accusing finger is pointed sometimes at society and its leaders but quite often it rises to a superior plane of metaphysical revolt when he accuses the Lord Almighty. He is prepared to have his life condemned to hell for ever if it can redeem the world.

It should not also be forgotten that Bhima was by birth a Kondh and he inherited in his blood the Kondh view of life which is not very different in basic essentials from that of the Alekha cult. The Kondh has an intense sense of belonging to the community. As a matter of fact he believes in sharing everything with the community. The Kondh also believes in the God above, the Dharmu and the Earth-goddess or Dhartani below. He was, as is revealed by the emotional climate of his poems, a simple and intense Kondh who had an almost simplistic faith in divine dispensation coupled with a personal sense of honesty and love for fellow beings.

Like many other Oriya poets before him (Sarala Das being the most notable), another important feature of Bhima's life and writings is that he always credited his poetic inspirations and insights to the grace of the Lord and was full of gratitude for this. He always made it out that whatever the Lord dictated through his voice that was all he wrote. In him we thus find the traditional Oriya poet's sense of humility and belief in divine grace as the source of all creativity.

In 1862 he seems to have met Mahima Gosain in the neighbouring village, Gramadiha, and was converted into the Mahima faith. Mahima Gosain is said to have attained his *siddhi* or final realisation in 1862 near the Kapilas hills of Dhenkanal and thereafter started out on his missionary purpose of spreading the message of Mahima Dharma among the people. Near Boudh in the adjoining Phulbani district he met Govinda Baba who later became one of the strong believers of the Mahima gospel and one of his closest associates. This meeting between Mahima Gosain and Govinda Baba is considered to be a great event in the history of Mahima religion. After this the Mahima faith got organised into a popular movement. It appears that from Boudh both Mahima Gosain and Govinda Baba went to Rairakhol where they met Bhima Bhoi in a small village of Gramadiha in or around 1862. Mahima Gosain made the unsophisticated Kondh boy conscious of his great poetic powers and inspired him to compose and sing songs in praise of the Divine. This brought about a spiritual transformation in the life of this Kondh boy Bhima Bhoi who now started composing a series of *bhajans* of exquisite beauty and great charm. By the age of sixteen he had already gained reputation as a spokesman of the Mahima faith. Legends have it that four of his younger disciples, notably Hari Panda and Basudev Panda, took down the songs which he chanted in moods of ecstasy. The travels of Mahima Gosain and Govinda Baba took them from Rairakhol to Sambalpur and then to Sonepur in western Orissa. At each of these places they were received with great enthusiasm. Later in the summer of 1863 they reached Cuttack and in the bright fortnight of the month of Kartika the ceremony of Mahima puja was celebrated at Khuntuni near Athgarh. By this time the believers of Mahima faith had swelled and the faith was spreading like wild fire in the coastal districts of Cuttack and Puri and, notably, in the

Khurda and Patia regions. Govinda Baba died in 1867 in an obscure village called Daruthenga. A great organiser and speaker, his death was a tragic blow to the Mahima faith. Mahima cult attacked the superstitions and blind beliefs of the Hinduism and had, to an extent, earned the anger of the Brahmins and the Vaisnavs. It appears that in 1873 some aggrieved persons represented to T.E. Ravenshaw, the then Commissioner, Orissa Division, that Mahima Gosain used to seduce the ladies of respectable families and make them embrace the Mahima faith. According to another legend there was also a serious conflict between the followers of Mahima Gosain and others at this period of time and the Government wanted the Gosain arrested. All these, however, do not appear to be true in terms of any verifiable historical records. Mahima Gosain moved towards Keonjhar but on the way he became seriously ill and in a village called Madhi identified as Kamakhyanagar in Dhenkanal district, he breathed his last in 1876. He was cremated at Joranda on the 10th day of the bright fortnight of the month of Phalguna. Joranda later became the most important centre of Mahima religion.

Mahima Gosain's death was a great shock to Bhima Bhoi. In his *bhajans* Bhima has treated him as the anthropomorphic form of *Sunya Brahma:* Bhima Bhoi attended the council at Joranda summoned immediately after Mahima Gosain's death to discuss the mechanism of consolidating and spreading the Mahima faith. Personally he was not very happy with the discussions. This was perhaps only too natural. As a creative genius of profound religious and poetic inspiration he did not want to get bogged down in the dry and, what he considered meaningless, ritual and technicalities of the faith. Instead he wanted to take up its essence and clothe it with a humanistic and emotive appeal to the common man. From Joranda he went to Khaliapali on the bank of the Ang river in

Bolangir district and made that village his seat of activities. The Maharaja of Sonepur allowed a monastery to be built there. Khaliapali Ashram thus became from 1877 onwards the most important centre of Mahima Dharma under the supervision of Ma Annapurna, the spiritual consort of Bhima Bhoi. Those who follow the Mahima philosophy and are followers of Bhima Bhoi are generally known as Kumbhipatias. This name is derived from a rope of the bark of Kumbhi tree which they wear around their waists. The Alekhas or Kumbhipatias are strongly opposed to idolatry and worship the formless god whom they call Alekha. Bhima Bhoi's preachings in favour of monotheism and his attack on idol worship might have given scope to some of his followers to think that the worship of Jagannath was the source of all superstitious beliefs in Hinduism. It appears that in 1881 there was a likelihood of conflict and violence when the Kumbhipatias hailing from Sambalpur area came to Puri to demonstrate against the practice of idol worship as symbolised in the Jagannath cult. It appears there was a procession of the Kumbhipatias led by 12 men and 3 women all shouting "Victory to Alekha". The story goes that they came to the temple gate, broke open the doors of the Bhoga mandap and entered the hall of Jagmohan. The Jaya Vijaya gate was shut against them and so they rushed to find some other entrance. The Pandas offered vigorous resistance and one Kumbhipatia fell down and died in the scuffle that followed. According to B.C. Mazumdar the Kumbhipatias derived their inspiration for the attack on Jagannath worship from Bhima Bhoi.

This allegation, however, is not supported by any official document. Mr. C.E. Buckland who describes the episode in his *Bengal under the Lieutenant Governors* makes no reference to Bhima Bhoi. *Utkal Dipika,* a contemporary newspaper, had the following to say in its edition dated 13.3.1881 (Part 16, No. 11).

"For the last two weeks there is a rumour going round that at Puri some nomadic persons resembling the local *Kelas* (snake-charmers) forcibly entered the Jagannath temple carrying cooked rice in pots. At that time the Lord's *bhog* was being carried into the main temple and therefore the guards tried to prevent them. This led to a scuffle between the guards and these intruders in which one of the latter died on the spot and the others threw the cooked rice they carried inside the temple precints and thereby despoiled the Lord's *bhog*. They also threatened the priests that they would burn down the Lord (his wooden image) and smear their bodies with its ash. Thereafter they left. Thus a series of offences punishable under criminal law seems to have taken place in a brief interval of time but there is yet no official news of either any arrests having been made or any criminal action against the wrong-doers. Nor is there any rumour regarding such action. But it would be a matter of serious concern if there is any truth in these rumours."

Sri N.N. Basu has held that Bhima had given a call for a congregation of the believers of Alekha cult to converge at Puri as he had heard a divine voice predict that Mahima cult would lead to the exposition of the hidden Buddha-image of Lord Jagannath. Sri Basu refers to legends that people from about thirty villages had congregated at Puri. It seems the Maharaja of Puri was prepared to welcome Bhima but later it transpired that Bhima's followers were out to destroy the wooden image of the Trinity and to establish the supremacy of the Formless, the Void as the ultimate Reality. This, according to him, led to a violent and bloody battle in presence of Bhima. Bhima realised the futility of his adventure and advised his followers to desist from the path of violence. He is supposed to have said that Lord Jagannath had already left Puri as Buddha and so this conflict was futile. After

this show of violence many of his followers were imprisoned, some were deported and a few others also fled to neighbouring ex-States seeking refuge from the British. In this moment of defeat for the Alekha cult Bhima is supposed to have counselled patience, fortitude and glorified the need for sacrifice in the cause of upholding the *dharma.*

All these statements to which Basu subscribes do not find any corroboration either in official or temple records. Nor do they find mention in any contemporaneous record. There is no reference whatsoever in Bhima Bhoi's own writings to this incident. It is extremely unlikely that the preacher of truth, tolerance and non-violence could have guided or have even remotely been responsible for such an incident if at all it had happened. On the other hand, there is evidence to prove that like Balaram Das and Jagannath Das, Bhima Bhoi was a devotee of Lord Jagannath and was fond of reciting long passages from Jagannath Das's *Bhagavata.* In fact he was responsible for incorporating some tenets of Jagannath philosophy into the concepts and ideas of Mahima faith. It is likely that the violent demonstration against the worship of Lord Jagannath to which a reference is made was inspired by some irresponsible and hot-headed persons who claimed themselves to be followers of Bhima. Bhima Bhoi, however, wanted the followers of Alekha to lead a life of self-discipline, righteousness and inner purity.

Bhima Bhoi did not lead the life of a recluse at Khaliapali. He prayed and preached, composed and sang. He enjoyed the company of his followers and devotees. Beyond this very little is known about his activities. He sought a synthesis between the life of the world and the life of the spirit. Ma Annapurna, his spiritual consort, was a great spiritual force in the Ashram. It appears there were four other consorts of Bhima Bhoi. But this also lacks any historical corroboration from contemporary records. Nothing is unfortunately known about his relationship with these ladies. Nor

is there any data about their personalities or their influence on him. They do not find much mention in his *bhajans* or other compositions, (In 1892 Bhima Bhoi was blessed with a daughter and a son who were named Lavanyavati and Kapileswara respectively. Bhima Bhoi died in 1894 when he was barely 45 or 46. All his consorts died sometime during the first half of 20th century. His son and daughter led the life of austerity till their death sometime in 1935-36. Samadhi temples were erected in honour of each member of the family.

# 2

# Tradition, Mahima Dharma and Bhima Bhoi

The works of Bhima Bhoi need to be viewed in the context of the philosophical ideas of Mahima Dharma and the latter's evolution from a long philosophic and religious tradition in Orissa. Mahima Dharma has emphasised a strict monastic discipline in the hands of Biswanath Baba, perhaps, the most important teacher of the cult in the current period. A system of designation for the *sanyasis* was introduced. While Biswanath Baba systematised Mahirma Dharma's teachings and sought to give it a formal conceptual frame, the older texts relating to Mahima cult and the literary works of Bhima Bhoi were more in the genre of medieval *bhakti* literature. In the writings of Bhima Bhoi the concepts of Mahima cult were transformed from dry cerebration into an emotional realisation and outpourings of the soul. His writings were more in the line of medieval mysticism than philosophical speculations. No wonder they were more popular among the rural folk.

It is, however, necessary to briefly refer to the main teachings and beliefs of Mahima Dharma. "Mahima Dharma", according to Eschman, "takes up the Buddhist concept of emptiness *(Sunya)*

and identifies it with the Hindu conceptions of *Parama Brahma* and *Isvara Purusa*. *Sunya Parama Brahma* is characterized more precisely with the concepts *alekha* (indescribable), *nirguna* (without attributes), *nirakara* (formless), *anadi* (eternal), *niranjana* (pure or without support) and *mahima* (radiance, glory), all of which already appear in the medieval Oriya literature for describing *Sunya Brahma* or as synonyms for Him."

The concept of *sunya* was in use in different schools of Hindu philosophical and religious traditions. Even the Buddhist concept of *sunya* had its link with similar doctrine found in Vedanta. In Mahayana school of Buddhism it was converted from a negative concept to a positive idea to imply the ultimate reality which underlies all manifestations in nature and the physical world. The concept ultimately trickled into a very large number of obscure religious cults and more particularly medieval Vaisnavism in Orissa. Ultimately *sunya* also came to be treated as the attribute of a personal god who can be attained through devotion. This personal god in fact was supposed to have the twin attributes of "being nowhere" and "being everywhere." This was a complex symbolism but it did emphasise the point that this higher reality was what gave meaning and substance to the visible world and that the latter derived its being from the former which did not have a definite form or shape. It was sometimes explained by the symbolism of fire and the object which was aflame. Fire like air did not have a physical being, a dimension, a shape or form. It always assumed the shape and form of the object which was burning. Higher realisation in life is the realisation of the "being" of fire and not the "becoming" of the objects which burn. The myriad physical objects and sensory perceptions are only colours of becoming. They do not constitute true reality. The true reality is one without beginning and end, one beyond shape and form. The psychic conditions and emotional states which are associated with this

craving to attain to the personal god have been explored at great length in the medieval literary school known as *Pancasakha.* Some attributes of this personal god which are frequently mentioned are *sunya, alekha, anadi, nirakara* and this is equated with Parambrahma or Sunyabrahma. *Moksa* or salvation consists in union of the soul through devotion or *bhakti* with this higher Reality. This is achieved not through any external rites, prescribed code of conduct, pilgrimages or the worship of idols but through a meditative path.

Mahima Swami, the founder of Mahima cult, was supposed to have been born in Orissa in A.D.1826. Mahima Swami himself has left behind no written works either on the philosophy he preached, its essential teachings or even about himself. It was left to Biswanath Baba to crystallise and record the philosophical and historical aspects of this cult and to Bhima Bhoi, the poet, to give expression to its basic teachings through intense and poignant poetry. It is possible to assert that but for Bhima, Mahima Dharma would have at most remained a mere obscure philosophical cult with esoteric ideas about void, the shapeless universal, the timeless entity and so on. In that form it would have hardly appealed to the common man. The central philosophical ideas and the history of Satya Mahima Dharma have been discussed in the four major works of Biswanath Baba: *Sarva Veda Vedanta Saratatwa Siromani Alekha Parambrahma Darshanam; Satya Mahimadharma Pratipadaka; Bhagavatsara Satyadharma* and *Satyamahimadharma Itihasa*. It was in Bhima's poetic utterances that the dry philosophical ideas and concepts of Mahima cult found their way to the hearts of millions in Orissa and outside this State through an outburst of lyric energy. The community prayers offered by the *bhaktas* of Mahima Dharma and even those who are not formally believers in the cult use the large repertoire of Bhima's songs, *jananas* and *bhajans*. Even now in the remote villages of Orissa as

the evening descends, at Bhagavat Tungis or community houses, among the *bhajans* recited are those of Bhima Bhoi to the accompaniment of tambourine. To participate in one such group prayers is indeed a spiritual and poetic experience. One is transported to the spiritual realm where the void and eternity blend with the small environments of time and space, where personal misfortunes and tragedies blend with the universal orchestra of a higher order of reality. And the main inspiration for this comes from Bhima who, despite the fact that he had not got the benefit of any formal higher education or schooling under Sanskrit scholars, has been responsible for some of the most exquisite and soul-stirring poetry ever written in the Oriya language. The four works of Biswanath Baba, the greatest spokesman of Alekha or Mahima cult in this century referred to earlier, throw light, apart from the philosophy of Mahima cult, on the life and times of Bhima and place him in the context of Oriya philosophic tradition relating to *Sunyavad* or voidism. The late Laxmi Narayana Sahu had argued that the concept of void in Mahima was, different from its counterpart in Buddhism. According to him "the Buddhist conception of *sunya* is that in the ultimate there is nothing. But the alekhist conception of *sunya* is that there is *only One* after all the appearances disappear. That again has no appearance." This is a very interesting and valid point and the concept of *Sunya* in Bhima's writings would seem to agree with this view. *Sunya* is not a total negation, a complete nascience or nonbeing. It is only a negation of appearances, of becomings. For it is the pure state of Being. The various stages of its becoming are only various forms or manifestations or becomings.

That *Sunyavada* or the concept of void had a long literary, philosophical history is amply clear. *Sunyavada* was essentially a part of the mystic view of life which had held sway in Oriya literature right from Baudhgan O' Doha times. Siddhacharya

Kanhupa, for example, expressed an intense and personal realisation of the individual psyche with the divine through a language that is symbolic, sometimes to the point of being obscure.

Bhima Bhoi's writings are a very important part of the Mahima or Alekha cult. Alekha cult is also popularly known as the cult of the Kumbhipatias. The Alekha cult believes in the idea of a void and in fact sings a lot about it but as a concept it is somewhat different from the concept found in Buddhism. Buddhism laid supreme emphasis on *karma yoga,* on the capacity of human action to work out one's deliverance from the cycle of life and no importance was attached to the concept of Grace of an Almighty which occupies a very important place in both Hinduism and Christianity. It was in effect a form of *karma yoga,* akin to Malraux's idea of 'escape through action' which in Buddhism meant *Nirvana.* It was thus based upon a system or belief that the world was full of miseries and the objective of life was to gain deliverance from the life-cycle. Buddha was silent about Brahman or a reality beyond the senses. In the Alekha cult there is a similar emphasis on *sunya* or void. Mahayana Buddhism was a branch of latter Buddhism and had gradually declined into Sahajayana or as it was known in popular parlance Sahajia. On Mahayana faith Saivism and Vaisnavism also gradually had their influence. Nagaarjuna had made efforts to bring together the *Brahman* and the activities of the *Sramanas* under one fold. He had also accepted *yoga* and *bhakti* in his philosophy and teaching. Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, the three primary deities of the Hindu pantheon and also Tara were accepted. Gradually in Buddhism *sakti* worship or mother worship also found a place. Later the philosophy of *Kalachakra* and the idea that *samsara* was created by the coming together of *sakti* and Adi Buddha (the primordial Buddha) also entered Mahayana Buddhism. Buddhists under the influence of this *Kalachakra* philosophy came to believe that the *sunya purusha*

who Has called as *Niranjana* (literally *niranjan* means the blemishless, the flawless) was the Creator of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar through his primordial energy of *Adi sakti.* In a way, therefore, *Sahajayana* philosophy became later indistinguishable from Vaisnavism. One could see this, for example, in the writings of the Bengali poet Chandi Das. In Alekha cult we come across the ideas of *Sunya Purusha,* the wheel of time or *Kalachakra* as also the idea of void and escape through right action.

As in latter Buddhism so also in Alekha cult *sunya* (void), *niranjana* (the blemishless), *Alekha* (the unwritten), the Brahman (the primary Being) and *Adimata* (the primordial mother) are some of the appellations used to describe the ultimate reality. In his *Stuti Chintamoni,* Bhima Bhoi has made specific reference to *Kalachakra.* Bhima also designates the Brahman as *Sahaja Ananda* or "the easily-realised Bliss".

The history of Oriya literature has a long tradition of referring to reality as the great void, as the unwritten word, the blemishless and the unmanifest. Some other epithets used to describe reality are *Anākar* (the shapeless), the *sunya purusha* (the Empty Being), *abyakta* (the unmanifest), *mahāsunya* (the great void), *Alekha* (the unwritten), *nirākāra* (the shapeless) and *Anādi* (the one without the beginning). Right from Sarala Das's *Mahabharata* through a long chain of literary works including Balaram Das's *Brahmanda Bhugola, Virāta Gita,* Jagannath Das's *Tulā Binā,* the writings of Achyutananda, Dinakrushna and Arakhita Das and many other lesser writers the Supreme Reality is delineated as one without form, without end or beginning, without shape, without qualities etc. In the Sarala *Mahabharata* there is a reference to the Supreme Godhead in the following lines:

*Jayatu Anādi*
*Abhaya nirākāra*
*Anāhata Purusha Tu*
*Anākāra jyoti*

(Victory to You, O' Lord one without beginning, without shape and the Fearless, Thou art the unmanifest *purusha,* the Light without shape).

In Balaram Das's *Virata Gitā,* we find the following lines:

*mahasunyara sunya helā*
*se sunya pranaba janmilā*
*pranaba akhyara sambhuta*
*Jiva parama duinara*

(From the great void, the void was created. From the void was born the Omkar. From this Omkar, the letters were created as also *jiva* and *parama).*

Achyutananda of the Pancasakha group also spoke of *ekakhyara Brahman,* the *Brahman* that is unique and does not ever face dissolution. He also describes it as *Alekha swarupa* i.e., as the Unwritten One.

The 16th century poetic works of the Pancasakhas was perhaps the most creative from the point of view of mystical writings. Of the five who were termed as Pancasakha, Jagannath Das and Balaram Das were the most important and in their hands mysticism acquired an intensity and range which made it one of the most creative periods of Oriya poetry. It was *sunyabada* that held the field at the time. The concept of ultimate reality, described as *Sunya Purusha* or the shapeless being, might have been influenced by the Buddhist idea of void. But this *Sunya Purusha* was the embodiment of both consciousness and energy. In Achyutananda,

one of the less important Pancasakhas, for example, the *Sunya Purushā* is described as:

"He remains ever detached and yet He is the creator of all illusions. He is eternally kind and inheres in all the evanescent clay-bodies. He knows all the conceits and mischiefs. He kills us in the void and yet takes us in the path of divinity. All alone He lives in the void and performs his *leelā."*

Medieval Vaishnav literature thus treated the concept of void not in the Buddhist sense of emptiness or absence. It was rather a presence, a concrete identity; the *Alekha Purusha* who was all powerful. In *Vishnugarva Purana,* for example, the Vaishnava Kavi Chaitanya Das describes almost in identical manner as Achyutananda the concept of this *Alekha Purusha.*

"His shape is one of total emptiness and yet He fills up the immense empty space with his being and that way He is omnipresent. Emptiness is His house and He moves in all the spheres through this emptiness."

The five Oriya poets generally described as Pancasakhas tried to put forth their ideas on the individual soul, its search for deliverance and the relationship between the individual soul and the universal soul through a number of generally accepted images or metaphors. The theory of *Pinda Brahmanda* was one such extended metaphor. The mystic element in the poetry of the Pancasakhas was based upon an intimate and sophisticated portrayal of the relationship between *purusha* and *prakruti,* the individual soul and the over-soul compared to Radha and Krishna and *sunya* was the eternal field of their Rasa. *Sunya* is thus not an absence; it is a ubiquitous presence sometimes identified with Vrindavana, sometimes with Goloka. In other words, *sunya* is the stage on which the divine performs his *leelā,* the drama of perpetual renewal and ever-recurring dissolution and rejuvenation, the unending sequence of life and death, in the ever-subsisting intimate

relationship between the soul and the over-soul. In Pancasakha literature the psychic conditions and the emotional states which are associated with the craving to attain to the personal god have been explored at great length and in considerable depth. *Moksha* is the union of the soul through devotion or *bhakti* with the over-soul. It is achieved not through any external rites or pilgrimages but through an intense meditative path, through a deep cleansing of the doors of perception. The tradition in the poetry of Boudhagan O' Doha, Pancasakha and medieval Vaishnavism found an even more poignant expression in the writings of Bhima Bhoi. In his *Stuti Chintamoni* and his *bhajans* he gave a powerful expression to not only the mystic ideas of personal salvation but also to the redemption of man in society from his cruel destiny. His poetry had not merely the meditative philosophical quality of Pancasakha literature but it also brought to it the lyricism and musical quality which was associated with earlier poets like Gopal Krushna, Banamali or Kavisurya. In extremely lyrical lines Bhima Bhoi brought forth the essence of the well-known Mahima cult in his celebrated lines quoted below. The poet was prepared to consign his soul to the hell if it could save humanity.

> Boundless is the anguish and misery of the living
> Who can see it and tolerate
> Let my soul be condemned to hell
> But let the universe be redeemed.

Bhima Bhoi considered himself to be a child and almost like a child he wanted to unravel the mysteries of existence. His was perhaps the most significant expression of mysticism in Oriya poetry.

# 3

# Stuti Chintamoni and Bhajanamala

*Stuti Chintamoni* is perhaps the most important poetical work of Bhima Bhoi. It is a collection of hundred *bolis.* Boli is a technical term in Oriya. It means a stanza or a canto. In Bhima it would be proper to call it a canto. Each *boli* consists of 20 stanzas of 2 lines each. Thus *Stuti Chintamoni* is a collection of 2000 stanzas or 4000 lines. It contains some autobiographical, personal and confessional verse as also a description of the degeneration of social values. It ends with a panegyric to the Alekha cult and an exhortation to suffering humanity to seek the grace of the Alekha and His *Mahima.*

From Sarala Das to Bhima Bhoi the concept of the highest Reality described as *Sunya Niranjana* and *Alekha* became a part of devotional literature. Each of these words has a long tradition in Indian metaphysical systems. *Niranjan* is described in the Upanishads as equivalent to *Brahman.* Laterally *niranjan* means the soul completely free from *agyana* or nascence. In *Stuti Chintamoni* Bhima Bhoi delineates his idea of cosmology which is broadly described as below:

"From the nameless unwritten Brahman which was the embodiment of silence, the void was born. From the existence of

this great void, space and sky were created. From the sky came the colours. Later, from the *anama* (the nameless) came fire, ether and water. Still later, from the nameless, the Sun, the Moon, the trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva and all the moving and static objects were created."

In *Stuti Chintamoni,* Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are thus given a lower position in the Alekha cosmology and also in its religious pantheon. At different points in the *Stuti Chintamoni* Bhima Bhoi has gone on to say that Brahma who is the ultimate God has manifested himself as Krushna and Jagannath. Mahima cult is basically a cult based on strong human compassion. In *Stuti Chintamoni* one can notice Bhima Bhoi's deep feeling of anguish to see human beings wallowing in guilt and sin. To Bhima society was a picture of depravity and lack of character. This, according to Bhima, was because of deviation from the correct path and ignorance of God's grace. Bhima entreats men to come to the path of rectitude which is laid down in the Mahima philosophy and has also warned that unless men come round to accept the new approach to life, the whole world is going to be destroyed by *yoginis.* The vision of an apocalypse, the end of the Dark Age or *Kali yuga* occupies a prominent place in his social and moral philosophy. The Dark Age is characterised by loss of moral values and compassion. Individuals take to the path of self-destroying sin and care nothing for their fellow-beings. Nor do they realise the need for following the righteous path by denying the temptations of the flesh. The result is chaos, anarchy in society and nescience, guilt-ridden conscience and lack of faith in human individuals. This Dark Age, however, would end and the Mahima cult and belief in its tenets are the avenues to recreate and regenerate society and human beings.

In a sense, therefore, Mahima cult is basically a humanist cult. It believes that even the worst sinner can attain deliverance

through devotion to the Lord. Lie, adultery, envy, greed are to be completely given up. Happiness and unhappiness are to be treated as equal. A woman is to be looked upon as a mother.

That Bhima Bhoi was actuated by a great passion for human upliftment and was anguished to see the prevailing moral degradation and social chaos is borne out in adequate measure in his writings. This is more particularly so in *Stuti Chintamoni* where he sees and surveys the sufferings and the miseries of mankind. Faced with the destiny of human pain Bhima Bhoi posited a firm vision of the destiny of human faith. He had two answers towards the destiny of pain—the religious and the poetic. Both emerged in his major writings and *Stuti Chintamoni* delineates not merely the gropings and search of the poet into the intricate questions of metaphysics but also his capacity to express deep human passion in the simplest possible language. It touches the heart because it is devoid of the artificiality and ornamentation that characterise so much of the literature of the medieval times. He was primarily a *bhakta,* a devotee of the Lord. Poetry was merely an outlet for his anguished soul, to express its craving to do something for suffering humanity.

The prayers and entreaties are described by Vaishnav poets to be primarily of three types. These three aspects may be described as below:

(1) Prayers where the thrust is to make known one's miseries to the Lord, to communicate to him one's anguish;
(2) Prayers which sing about the Lord's supreme powers and his capacity to gant deliverance; and
(3) Prayers which are in the nature of supplications for granting the minimum objectives desired by the devotee. All the three levels of entreaties and prayers can be seen in *Stuti Chintamoni.*

Scholars have tried to put Bhima Bhoi in the same category of saints like Ramakrishna and Sarala Das. Comparisons in literature or religious lore are always odious and are best avoided. They do not convey much meaning. In any case so little is known about Bhima's life that it is well-nigh impossible to meaningfully compare his life with that of either Ramakrishna or Sarala Das. But like Sarala who credited all his creativity and inspiration to goddess Sarala, Bhima attributed his writings to divine inspiration and not to his own talent. A perusal of his major work *Stuti Chintamoni* makes one feel the intensity of his passion to cleanse the self from all sins and to bring about a social order based upon true religiosity. In various *bolis* (stanzas or cantos) of *Stuti Chintamoni,* the poet delineates the spiritual condition in which it is possible to achieve genuine devotion for the Brahman. A total detachment and a deep craving like that of a child characterised his attitude and approach to life. He expressed the agony and ecstasies of life and the dawn of divine grace in soul-stirring poetry. Crying to his heart's content, Bhima composes these lines:

"I do not know if through deep meditation and intellect one can see the vision of the Almighty *Guru.* But I do see Him and then forget what to tell Him when I see Him."

In these lines Bhima not only establishes by implication the superiority of *bhakti* (devotion) over *gyana* (intellect) but also seeks to establish a spiritual and emotional condition through which the devotee attains a vision of the Supreme Reality or Alekha Niranjan. The twin aspects of his quest for salvation and the attainment of a higher order of existence are inextricably linked to each other. There is a sense of personal anguish at one's predicament. A realisation that through repeated self-examination and self-purification the individual psyche can make itself a receptacle for the Brahman, runs through his writings. This quest for individual purification, for self-control and self-abnegation

also occasionally leads to a spirit of despondency and even anger. When the goal still seems to remain distant and unrealised, when all attempts at self-abnegation do not bear fruit and the individual ego again seeks to predominate, when the world around appears to be sinking more and more into guilt and sin, there is passion and anger. On such occasions Bhima raises his voice against his individual self and also against society. Along with this search for personal purity he has a vision of a new life for humanity and a burning desire to lift it out of its present degeneration. For this purpose he is prepared to sacrifice everything including his own self.

In his preface to *Stuti Chintamoni,* late Professor Artaballav Mohanty went to the extent of comparing Bhima Bhoi to Jesus Christ. He was of the opinion that just as Jesus Christ suffered crucification for the suffering humanity, Bhima's soul was ever on the cross suffering all the agony and all the anguish of a troubled soul seeking a better and purer life for himself and a better future for the whole of humanity. The following lines bring to mind the words of Jesus on the Cross:

"Oh my Lord, why don't you help me? For preaching your glory, my own reputation is broken to pieces. For preaching you as the unknown one, they taunt me as a Christian and put me to untold sufferings. Though covered with sin, they denounce me if I talk to them the religion of truth. They shout, 'Drive him away, drive him away, let us see how his Master protects him. He is a sinner, refuse him food or shelter.' And when I preach of equality, they retaliate by treating me like a dog. My Lord, this is my fate wherever I go. I feel I should henceforth stop going about. In the face of these tyrannies where shall I go?"

(Translation: Mayadhar Mansinha)

Bhima was aware of the tyrannies that afflicted human life: tyrannies both social and metaphysical. The former were of men

against men, of a group against another. In his own life he had faced insults, humiliation and hostility as he continued his travels and preached monotheism and attacked idolatry. He was a rebel against prevailing social and ethical values in every sense of the term, in one of his *bhajans* he taunts Hindu idolatry:

"It is in sheer ignorance that people worship icons, offering cakes, sweets and puddings, and appealing to them for protection. They do not realise the simple fact that those are mere figures, without souls. How can they grant them their wishes? People do not worship Him who created them but run to statues of wood and metal and say, 'Save us, Save us'! How unthinking is this approach of living human beings to dead idols! And how strange that He who created humanity out of nothing is so clean forgotten !"

(Translation: Mayadhar Mansinha)

Dr. Mayadhar Mansinha has compared him to "early Christian evangelists". It is true that in spite of his burning faith in a coming millennium where social tyrannies would end and a more egalitarian, equitable and 'religion-oriented' social order would prevail, occasionally he seemed to be on the brink of despair and terrible mental agony. That, however, did not take away his faith that all this would one day end. He says in one of his *bhajans* attacking the "pervasive paganism" all around:

"These tyrannies shall end. The time is not far off when the great Master will break the ego of these tyrants. He will get things done in such subtle ways that the sinners will disappear one by one without the others being even aware of it. They are immersed in such sins and immoralities and so involved in hypocrisies that no religion can save them in any way. Some of those sinners will be burnt in fire, some will be drowned in water and some will just drop off and die. Some will be stung to death by serpents and others will meet death with halters round their necks. Still others will suffer from unknown diseases, their

bodies shaking with palsy, and those that survive will be lacking in vitality."

(Translation: Mayadhar Mansinha)

In the Indian context sin is primarily supposed to be of two types—the inherited and the acquired. The former is the result of one's actions in previous births and, therefore, the individual soul has no means of running away from it or controlling it. The latter is the result of one's action in this birth. While, therefore, one could keep away from the latter by devotionally ordained action based upon self-discipline, the former can only be removed with the grace of God. This is why even though aware of the cleansing powers of *bhakti* Bhima also emphasised the role of selfless devoted action. Allied to his idea of selfless devoted action were also the twin concepts of surrender and ultimate sacrifice. Here was a poet who was prepared to be in hell for ever if it helped redeem the world and alleviate the sufferings of humanity. And he also emphasised the crying need for total surrender of everything, happiness and miseries, guilt and sin at the feet of the Lord:

"The twins of happiness and misery, bondage and freedom, are all your creation. Who can carry with ease this heavy burden of sin which is your creation? Let me, therefore, lay them at your own feet, why should not you finally settle this matter? Where else shall I go for a solution? I have been hoping to collect my sins in tray and place it at your feet. Those devoted to you get wasted, praying and weeping. Why don't you forgive people their sins or run the world in an equitable manner? Who, like you, could indeed be so heartless as not to have compassion for sentient beings in their endless sorrows and sufferings? As for me, I would prefer to stay in hell forever, if that would save the world."

What brought him special anguish is a feeling that because of the *Kali yuga* guilt and sin were on the increase and the whole

world was running down towards an abysmal darkness and hell. In the 26th canto of *Stuti Chintamoni* there is a reference to this.

"The men of the world would go down the drain in sinful action and behaviour. When I think of the nine worlds they come to my mind as a small plate. And the fifty-six crore living beings appear like a blade of grass before my mind's eyes. In one single day, in a moment, I could over-turn the world. But I only clench my teeth and refrain since I do not have the divine dispensation of the Lord."

This is followed by a piteous prayer to the Almighty for human deliverance:

> Crying piteously all your devotees are rolling in the dust;
> Forgive us our guilt, our crime,
> O Lord please deliver the world.

The concept of yuga was integral to Bhima Bhoi's thinking. Starting from the *Satya yuga* to *Kali yuga* it was a gradual degeneration of values in society. Bhima gives a detailed description of this degeneration in the 24th, 25th and 26th cantos of his *Stuti Chintamoni.* He draws a frightening picture of what is likely to happen because of the predominance of sin. He describes how there will be darkness in the day time, how the sea will come surging and drown the entire world and how the stars will fall off from the skies. He says how men have been afflicted by all the lower instincts such as greed, deceit, lie, cheating and inauthenticity. From this impending communal disaster Bhima seeks the grace of Alekha and calls upon the humanity to come back to the path of righteousness. He feels that the end of *Kali yuga* is very near. In the last canto of *Stuti Chintamoni* (the 100th *boli)* he mentions this and calls upon everybody to pray to Lord Alekha and to utter the name of Mahima. Mahima literally means the power or the glory. Here, as used by Bhima Bhoi, it is indistinguishable from the

power and glory of the Almighty, the Alekha Niranjan, the unwritten, the blemishless, Supreme Reality. He calls on the *rudras,* the men in Brahmaloka, the gods, the nagas, the asuras, in fact the whole of the living world, to remember the Supreme Reality and ask for His grace and compassion. Simultaneously, he also emphasises the role of righteous path and self-purification.

The *bolis* of *Stuti Chintamoni* could be sung like the *bhajans.* Castanet and tambourine add beauty and charm to these recitations. Together the more than three hundred *bhajans* and the *bolis* of *Stuti Chintamoni* form some of the finest compositions in Oriya religious poetry. The *bhajans* are unsophisticated, unvarnished and simple in structure and language and yet they breathe an air of great passion, intense emotional and holy spirit. Sometimes they excel in the quality of image building. The seven *bhajans* included in this book with their originals in roman script show this inspired poet's capacity for creating surprising images and metaphors. Through the contrast of conflicting visions, concepts and situations sometimes they build an eerie and poignant poetic landscape. A landscape where strange flowers blossom and fall unto dust; of exotic bees of the spirit who seek the *rasa* of realisation; of the silent music of the spheres; of a spring when the tree flowers but has no shade; of flowers that have four colours but there is only poison in them; of He who is without limbs and yet moves; the one who is born without parents, has not sucked his mother's breast, yet has thriven on her milk. It creates a landscape where rivers swell and surge, meteors shoot down to the earth; a landscape of a sea without water; of a ground that is firm but shakes with strange footfalls; of a land where everyone is dressed like a king, none, however, wears any fabric; of a dance to the music that is inaudible. In the words of a *bhajan,* Bhima Bhoi reaches the stage

of that lisping language where the metaphors are inappropriate and the rhetorics out of place. And all this we may remember from a blind tribal poet belonging to the unsophisticated, half-clad and primitive Kondh tribe tucked away in the hills and jungles of western and southern Orissa. Mansinha has called him the poet laureate of the Alekha cult. That he is and it is really his passionate lyrics embodying the fundamental essence of Mahima or Alekha cult which won over millions to this cult. But he is more than a poet of a religious cult. He is a lyricist par excellence and his sense of music is unexcelled. There have been discs of his *bhajans* to which some of the finest voices of modern Oriya music have lent their voice.

When the Sahitya Akademi wanted to have some lines or a couplet from each of the fourteen languages and literatures of India to symbolise its total ethos, Oriya writers chose those two soul-stirring lines of Bhima from the Twenty-seventh Boli of his *Stuti Chintamoni:*

> Let my soul be condemned to hell
> But let the universe be redeemed.

From *Stuti Chintamoni,* four extracts from the 15th, 22nd, 27th and 75th *bolis* have been given in translation along with the original in Roman script. In the original they reveal Bhima's hold on the powerful folk idiom and the strength of the colloquial speech. In his hands, for the first time, religious poetry came to be couched in intense passion and colloquial idiom. In the medieval *bhajans* and in the poetry of Bhaktakavi Madhusudan, the intensity of the emotion finds expression in a comparatively rarified language. By comparison Bhima Bhoi's language is earthy and vibrates with the high-strung emotions of the poet. These emotions are indeed a

curious mix ranging all the way from powerful supplication to righteous indignation and from abject surrender to indignant moral assertion.

A reading of *Stuti Chintamoni* and *Bhajanamala* leaves one no doubt of the stature of Bhima Bhoi as a great poet. One is surprised at his sheer audacity to mould language to his emotions and not to be bogged down with either the form or style or the linguistic structure. These are signs of a mature poet and Bhima Bhoi certainly was one.

# 4

# Other Works

In *Brahma Nirupana Gita,* Bhima Bhoi attempts to define the nature and qualities of Brahman. This is attempted particularly in the 4th canto. The description is through a series of binary oppositions or pairs of contradictions arising out of situations, qualities and objects. Some of these contradictions are:

> He is the disciple and He is the guru; He is darkness and He is light; He inflicts punishments and it is He who bears it; He is the prisoner and He is the jailor; He is action, He is illusion and yet He punishes both as Yama, the God of Death and as Time; He speaks and yet He is inarticulate; He is formless and yet with form; He is the strange artist and all the art objects; He is the yogi, the one who has renounced and has attained the Divine, He is also the bhogi, the one who enjoys.

Bhima Bhoi was aware that the Vedas and the Vedantas have not been able to determine or define the Brahman, the ineluctable and changeless reality which underlies all the transient and fleeting appearances. As a matter of fact he mentions this in his writings more than once. He was aware that not through the *shastras* or

through learned discourses of the ratiocinative mind that one can get into the awareness of the Divine. That way you only get into more and more uncertainties and doubts. The academics who parade their knowledge cannot know the Brahman because the Brahman remains beyond the scope of only reason, logic and knowledge. He is attainable only through an intense craving like the craving of the child for the mother. He is the ever-graceful, the all merciful and is prepared to excuse all our sins only if we seek His blessings and grace wholeheartedly and give up all ego. In this respect there is something in Bhima Bhoi which is reminiscent of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Even though unlike Ramakrishna, Bhima Bhoi was no mystic used to get into trances, he believed in the power of intense craving of the soul for the divine to bring about the purification of the individual existence. In *Brahma Nirupana Gita* he does not thus attach much importance to scholastic knowledge as embodied in the Vedas, Puranas and other traditional lores. On the other hand, he says that none of these sacred lores has been able to comprehend His nature and character. He goes on to add that the thirty-three crore gods, the innumerable yoginis, rishis, the gandharbas and kinnars could not know his power and his manifestations. The stars, the planets could not comprehend him either. The cycle of seasons, the four dharmas could not also incorporate the mystery of his being. Elsewhere Bhima Bhoi has made a reference to the sound of his veena, the veena of the Divine, of the Almighty. The soundless sound of his veena can be listened only through *dhyana yoga.* The road leads on to that void where there is eternal spring, where hunger and thirst don't affect the soul. It was that road which he constantly kept in mind and wanted to achieve, the true vision of the ultimate Reality.

In *Astka Bihari Gita,* Bhima Bhoi has given a call to all humanity and particularly the *bhaktas* to lead a pure, austere life

and to put their mind and heart completely under divine dispensation. He has been anguished at the realisation of the evils and injustices which abound in Kali Yuga. He has been hurt to the quick by the degeneration of society and the decline of values. *Astka Bihari Gita* contains a series of steps which are prescribed to get over this decline both for social regeneration and individual deliverance. Satya Mahima Dharma is advocated as the essence of the divine path when you give up the ego and all its deceptions and seek salvation in the Alekha and his Mahima. *Astka Bihari Gita* proposes the essences of *gyana* and *bhakti* yoga in simple terms. Bhima beautifully delineates the idea of the universal presence of the Brahman in every being, in every creation and suggests that salvation can easily be attained by complete devotion and surrender. In his words: "There is a boatman at the *ghat,* the river-crossing. He would cross over your soul. This body is like a dense forest. Remember the Lord; He remains within you, permeating your entire physical body."

*Nirveda Sadhana* is an important piece on Mahima Dharma and its essence. But its poetry is not of a high order. The sequences run as a dialogue between Prabuddha Guru Mahima Swami, the founder of Satya Mahima Dharma and Govind Baba. The essence of Satya Mahima Dharma is brought out through this dialogue. Mahima Swami has explained to Govind Baba the essentials of the religious path of Satya Mahima and has removed his doubts and difficulties. The essence of Satya Mahima Dharma has been emphasised as the path *of nibrutti* or detachment or disengagement and not *prabrutti* or attachment. The external symbols of sandalwood paste mark, flowers, *tilak* or sacred thread are unimportant. What is important is to live a pure and simple life, even beg and accept whatever is available and live on it. The practice enjoined in the Vedas is not very material to human life and its quest for salvation. One can achieve the Brahman if inside

the soul there is *nirveda sadhana,* i.e., great devotion and austere action which does not even depend on the Vedas. Certain technical concepts of Satya Mahima Dharma such as Ekakhyara, Sunya, Omkar, Ajapa Mantra etc. have also been discussed in these dialogues.

To an extent *Sruti Nisedha Gita* is at the same level and in the same line as *Nirveda Sadhana.* In reply to Govind Baba's questions Anadi Brahman has explained the activities which are prescribed under Satya Mahima Dharma. In this work Anadi Brahman is supposed to be the Brahman, the ultimate guru, the founder of Satya Mahima Dharma who has appeared in the world. He explains to Govind Baba why, not merely the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar but also the thirty-three crore gods are ignored by Mahima Dharma. It also explains why the eight lakh *yoginis,* the nine crore *kantanis,* the stars, the planets and why the sanctified objects like *nirmalya,* ritual worship, *tulsi* etc. are also abolished. What is sought to be established is the complete surrender at the feet of the Lord Alekha. Through it alone the undivided being can attain salvation. Gods and rituals cannot help the attainment of such salvation.

*Cautisa Madhu Cakra* is another major work of Bhima Bhoi. Cautisa is a celebrated poetic form in Oriya literature. In this form Bhima Bhoi has experimented with the capacity of Oriya language to a very fine degree. In the normal cautisa form the stanzas are arranged in such a way that the first word of each line begins with a letter as per the order of letters in the Oriya alphabet. Bhima has not only composed cautisa in such serial of the letters in the alphabet but also in the reverse order. Besides in each line he has sought to use a number of words beginning with the letters used as the first letter of the first word. These cautisas are generally composed in plain and simple language and are often couched in *nawakhyari chhanda.* The concepts of Mahima Dharma, the end of

Kali Yuga and the need for divine grace to bring about salvation of individual soul and social regeneration have been explained in this.

*Adi-Anta Gita* is almost a technical treatise where the secrets of the body have been sought to be explained in metaphysical terms. The *Jiva* or being is presented as the female of the species and the *Parama* or the Supreme Being as the male Lord and through an elaborate symbolism the essentials of the physical body, its ten gates, ten incarnations, seven islands, nine *ratnas* (jewels) and ten *siddhis* have been elucidated. The essential features of a devoted wife have also been described and the coming together of man and woman in sex-union has been sought to be explained in metaphysical terms. The essence of sexual activity and the relationship between man and woman are presented as parallel to what happens to the soul, the individual being in its quest for supreme deliverance by surrendering itself to the Lord.

# 5

# An Assessment

Writing way back in 1923 B.C. Mazumdar had the following to say about Bhima Bhoi's poetry:

"I have selected only a small number of his doctrinal poems but the readers will see that though Bhima Bhoi was not educated in any school, his language is good and his style is elegant. The first poem in the selection is a *cautisa* in reverse order; this new form of *cautisa* shows that Bhima Bhoi displayed his originality even in small matters. Though it is a mystic doctrinal poem, no one will fail to notice how sweet the poem is and how captivating is its style. *It is a pity that his works are all in manuscript* (italics mine) and the country which should be proud of him has not as yet appreciated his merit. In my humble opinion, he is a genius, and for his moral courage and clearness of thought, he is a unique personality in Orissa."

He went on to add, placing Bhima as a poet in the context of contemporaneous Oriya Poetry:

"I have already said that the concluding section of the second volume of the Typical Selections contains the writings of a group of those poets of modern time, who have nothing modern about them, and who in style, in diction, in meter and in the choice of

subjects for poetry have imitated Upendra Bhanja and Abhimanyu Samanta. These remarks are not however fully applicable to Bhima Bhoi who as an earnest and sincere religious man composed his poems in simple language, being inspired by high thoughts and good moral ideas; but as his style is altogether of the time of the earliest poets and as the civilization of the modern times did not even indirectly affect him, I put him under this group. I am personally a great admirer of the Saint Bhima Bhoi, and consider his life and writings to be highly interesting and educative."

Bhima Bhoi did not care to print his writings during his life-time nor did he even bother to preserve them. He composed his *bhajans* and songs primarily for the propagation of the tenets of Mahima Dharma through simple and passionate poetry. A *grihastha bhakta* of Mahima cult he lived his life as a recluse and was primarily a seer and a visionary. No wonder he never cared to get his writings properly preserved and published. During his life-time none of the manuscripts were published. Gradually in the last few decades serious attempts were made by the followers of Mahima Dharma and particularly those who had seen in his *jananas* and *bhajans* gems of great poetry to collect and publish them. Prachi Samitee founded by late Professor Artaballav Mohanty published two of his most important works *Stuti Chintamoni* (1931) and *Cautisa Madhuchakra* (1948). They also published *Brahmanirupana Gita* and *Bhajanamala***.** Each has a scholarly introduction by Professor Mohanty, himself an erudite scholar on ancient and medieval Oriya literature and philosophy. Dharma Grantha Store, Cuttack, whose publisher was himself a great believer in Mahima cult published Bhima Bhoi's works one by one between 1955 and 1960. Later in 1972 they brought out a fairly definitive Granthabali or Collected Works of Bhima Bhoi in one volume of nearly eleven hundred pages. It has an elaborate introduction by Sri Karunakar Sahu who is also a bhakta of Mahima and a scholar in that field.

In 1971 another *Bhimabhoi Granthabali* (Collected Works) in one volume of nearly 900 pages was also published by another Cuttack Publisher with an elaborate introduction. The former volume contains eight full-length books by Bhima Bhoi. It also contains eight *bhajans* composed in Bengali by Bhima Bhoi. Among his followers there were Bengalis in Orissa and it is possible either by himself or with the help of fellow *bhaktas* he composed these songs in Bengali. Scholars acquainted with Bhima Bhoi's writings and the Mahima cult which formed the main thematic backdrop to his writings feel that the two works *Padma Kalpa* and *Brahma Chalak* included in the 1971 Collected Works are not Bhima's own compositions. This appears plausible. A comparison of his eight other works with these two shows noticeable differences in style and approach. These two works seem to lack the colloquial and rich folk idiom, the glowing lyricism and simple passion of Bhima's other works. On the other hand two other works *Manu Mandala* and *Mahima Vinoda* which, in legend, are supposed to have been composed by Bhima are yet to be traced and published.

This difficulty was perhaps inherent in the situation. According to legends Bhima used to recite his *bhajans* daily after morning bath and worship, seated on the bark of a tree. Four *bhaktas* of Mahima cult used to take down his composition on palm-leaf with iron stylo. The names of two of these scribes Hari Panda and Basu Panda occurs in *Satya Mahimadharma Itihasa* of Biswanath Baba.

It is said that Bhima used to compose four prayer songs or *bhajans* in one raga at a time. He would first give out the refrain line of each of these four to the four scribes and then sing each of the *bhajans*. From his *Bhajanamala* it is apparent they were composed in groups of four. In one *bhajan* he says:

''In one raga I composed four songs. I am the hapless Bhima, but my guru is all powerful. Under his fearless banner I have taken

shelter and drink the nectar from his feet. With his grace I see the inner and outer reality with the eyes of knowledge."

His collected *bnajans* set in different *ragas* and *chhandas* number three hundred ten. Perhaps a large number of them are still untraced or may have been lost. Legend has it that after composition Bhima used to send the *bhajans* to be sung before Mahima Swami. Thereafter bhaktas used to take it over and sing in groups with tambourine and castanet accompaniment. The first *bhajan* is said to have been sung in 1865 at Khuntuni near Athagarh. No wonder in this process a number of *bhajans* may have been misplaced or lost.

In Bhima Bhoi's poetry one does not notice the technical competence or sophistication of Upendra Bhanja. Upendra Bhanja's obsession with the jugglery of words and his mastery in repeating the same word in a line signifying different meanings creating a musical upsurge was unique to him and none after him could aspire to it. Nor can one find in Bhima Bhoi the capacity for detailed description and painting pictures in words we find in Radhanath Ray towards the last decade of 19th century. Bhima Bhoi's poetry shares the lyricism and musical quality associated with the poets like Gopalkrishna, Banamali or Kavisurya though in a somewhat different way. While Gopalkrishna, Banamali and Kavisurya primarily deal with the Radha-Krishna theme and the various colours of the rainbow of their divine love, Bhima Bhoi has an agonised soul tormented by the degeneration of contemporary society and the personal craving for salvation. His poetry is a peculiar combination of the unique and the universal, the social and the personal. In the other three lyric-poets the theme is mostly the public theme and an element of detachment and romanticised anguish is predominant. Bhima Bhoi, on the other hand, speaks mostly in a confessional voice and his poetry springs from an urge to seek both personal salvation and the redemption of man in

society from a cruel destiny. From this point of view, his poetry shares the intense and passionate outpourings of Dinakrushna, the stark simplicity and clarity of Jagannath Das's Bhagavata and the vision and the sense of shared destiny we find in the Sarala Mahabharata. He never intended to startle the reader either with his knowledge or the jugglery of words and idioms largely borrowed from Sanskrit or a sophisticated technique in using them. He did not bother about language and imagery for its own sake. There was no emphasis on the physical or the sensuous. His *bhajans, cautisas* and the different *gitas* are primarily intended as the musings of a soul craving for meaning and significance.

*Bhajans* occupy a very important place in Bhima Bhoi's writings. These *bhajans* were meant to be sung either individually or in a group, sometimes to the accompaniment of musical instruments. By and large they are based upon the delineation of spiritual experience in simple and unadorned style. Some times they are long and are largely lyrical. In the evolution of Oriya literature *bhajans* occupy a very important place. They have generally been classified into two groups, *saguna* and *nirguna.* In the first category the devotee sings panegyrics of a particular god or goddess to whom he is devoted and seeks to celebrate their super-natural or supra-rational powers. The devotee expresses his inner cravings and seeks blessings in this world and the hereafter.

In the second category of *bhajans* no particular desire either for salvation here or hereafter, or for any other form of worldly blessings, is expressed by the devotee. In Bhima Bhoi we can notice both the types of *bhajans.* Sometimes they are totally detached and cool even though the concern remains group-welfare and group-anxiety. At other times it is deeply personal, intimately passionate and sensuous. This is perhaps because Bhima Bhoi had a duality in his life and in his general approach to social problems. He was intensely concerned with the group, the community. He

was also very withdrawn and intensely individualistic. The language of these *bhajans* is often symbolic and this symbolism calls for a more detailed analysis. Sometimes the symbolism borders on technical religious jargon and esotericism but by and large, they are less obscure and drawn from metaphysical ideas on body and soul, on life and the world.

The tradition of the *bhajans* goes back to *Charyapada* and even to the Vedic hymns. Acchutananda, Balaram, Kabir, Nanak and Suradas and a host of other saint-poets belonged to this school of poet-composers for whom the important thing was to present a soul's dialogue with a higher order of reality in an authentic and intense amalgam of intellect and devotion. These *bhajans* usually contained a reference to God both in His form and formless aspects and also dealt with the themes of the nature of the physical body and the soul. In earlier centuries the *bhajan* writers used to refer to Rama and Krishna as *alekha niranjan.* Bhima Bhoi has also referred to Mahima Gosain who inspired him to poetry and lyricism as *alekha niranjan.*

An important point to realise is that Bhima Bhoi was never conscious that he was a writer; nor he had any strong desire to engage himself in writing for its own sake or to earn fame as a writer. Spreading the inner message of Mahima Dharma was one of the major objectives of his writing. This is why in his writings we find a strong element of his personal life and its struggles, the inspiration he derived from his guru, the dream-like quality of the soul's dialogue with the Infinite in the full range of its anguish and ecstasy and all these expressed in a style and language which are easily understood by the man in the street. The major achievement of Bhima Bhoi consists in expressing difficult Upanisadic ideas in simple, lyrical and unadorned language and style. The result is that even today these simple *bhajans* and songs are the heart-throb of millions and every evening they are sung with the help of cymbals

and tambourines in the villages of Orissa. Several examples can be cited in the poems presented in this book which would show his excellence in putting across difficult metaphysical concepts and ideas in simple and easily understood language. It is no doubt extremely difficult to bring out in English translation how he achieved a great measure of success in this endeavour of rendering abstract philosophical concepts into concrete objects or emotions. The Upanishads, for example, refer to the ultimate Reality as *asangoyam purushah.* This is an abstract idea referring to the *purusha* or the self which does not have friends or relations and expressed in a highly Sanskritised idiom. Bhima Bhoi concretises it by picturing it as a friendless withdrawn soul and its Oriya equivalent can easily be picked up as a social type. The language and the theme of his *bhajans* thus concretise and render simple very important philosophical and metaphysical ideas. In this he achieved such a level of success that it could be easily treated as unparalleled in the development of Oriya religious literature.

# 6

# Selections from Poetry

While *Stuti Chintamoni* contains a number of biographical details and is also excellent poetry, it is in his *bhajans* that Bhima Bhoi excels himself. Legend has it that he used to sing these *bhajans* and his disciples used to take them down. These *bhajans* reveal an ardent sincerity and religious passion that is extremely appealing. They have also an anguish which is personal and at the same time universal. Seven of these *bhajans* are presented here.

*Stuti Chintamoni,* one of the earlier compositions of Bhima Bhoi, contains a hundred *bolis* each having twenty stanzas of two lines each. This well-known work of the poet is remarkable for the religious fervour that informs the *bolis* and the compact and colloquial idiom in which they are couched. Here, extracts from four *bolis* are presented in prose translation.

The translations have been done by the author.

# 1

*Pāda pāṇi nāhiṃ tāṇku dhariba kie?*
*Emanta brahma svarūpa dekhā na y(j)āe //0//*

*Nāhiṃ tāṅka peṭa aṇṭā, phitāi kahuchi goṭā;*
*Nara deha vahi tāṇku kaḷibā nuhe/*
*Tāṇka a pari Śānti paṇe, Tribhuvane nāhim jaṇe;*
*Nindā stuti hāni lābha sakaḷa sahe //1//*

*Bhakṣaṇa nāhiṃ āhāra, Raja Viry(j)yaru Bāhāra,*
*Kṣudhā tṛṣā kale ksīra nīra na pie /*
*Na lāgai aṅge dhūli, Virāji Disánti Jhali;*
*Nidrā Ghumāile ubhā āsane súe //2//*

*Icchāre āsanti bhrami, Bhakata Bhāvaku Premī;*
*Śuṇi Chāhiṃbāku karṇa chakṣu na thāe /*
*Nāhiṃ mukha jihvā nāsā, Uttara na die bhāṣā;*
*Āga pachha jāṇi dhīre samīre rahe //3//*

*Ulata pālaṭa nohi, Mahā śūnya śūnya dehī;*
*Mukha bate jihvākaṇṭhe bakhāṇi nohe /*

# 1

He has no hands, no feet
Who indeed can hold him?
Rarely one can see
The original shape of this *Brahma.*

He has no belly, no waist
Truly with our human intelligence
No one can comprehend him.
In all the three worlds
There is none like him of peaceable nature.
He is indifferent to both praise and blame
profit and loss.

He takes no food and is not
Born out of any union of husband and wife.
He takes no food or water
To appease hunger and thirst.

Dust cannot touch him
And his body shines resplendent
He stands and enjoys his sleep
He goes wherever his devotees seek him
With the ardour of the soul.

*Sadā jaya purṇānanda paile charaṇe vanda;*
*Nirantare ājñā tinipure udaye //4//*

*Nahiṃ tāṅka varṇachihna, Aśeṣa rūparu bhinna;*
*Sakaḷa dharma vidhāna karanti nyāye /*
*Āsibā y(j)ibā heuchi, Kari sarva karāuchi;*
*Niskāma y(j)ogare nija namaku thue //5//*

*Se brahmara teja jhāse, Rahi na paruchi pāśe;*
*Anubhava pada mātra karichi laye /*
*Kahe Bhīmasena Bhoi, Pūrvadige chhanti rahi;*
*Duhkha Sukha jaṇāibi bheṭile pāye //6//*

He has no eyes or ears to see and hear
He has no face, tongue or nose
He never answers
He mingles with the breeze and sits there.

He does not turn and yet
Moves as the void within the great void.
The mouth and tongue cannot describe him.
Glory to him;
Total bliss flows from him.
The three worlds are governed by his will
And yet he is no where.

He is different from all shapes
And yet He prescribes righteous *Dharma*
And is the doer of all things;
He moves in the void
And is the cause of all that ever happens.

The brightness of that *Brahma*
Makes it impossible going near
Only in my mind I feel Him;
Says Bhima, if ever I meet him,
I would tell him how I have fared in this world.

# 2

*Mūḷa śūnya gharaku kara viveka \\0*

*Nihśabda se bhuvana, Ghu ghu nāda garjana /*
*Agādha Sāgara, Nāhiṃ tahiṃ nīra /*
*Pūri rahichi hrada paṅka //1//*

*Na paḍi puṭa beḍha, Cāri duāre kheḷa /*
*Mahā nitya bhūiṃ, Ṭaḷa Ṭaḷa nāhiṃ /*
*Pādaghāte paḍuachi chamaka //2//*

*Janḍe janḍe suveśa, Na thāi jhīna vāsa /*
*Chauṣaṭhi bandhare, Nṛtya se mandire /*
*Na bājaī ḍhola damā ṭamaka //3//*

*Madhye prabhu vijaye, Anāme rakhi kāye /*
*Alekha mahimā, Ki debi upamā /*
*Āśre kale khaṇḍu achi pātaka //4//*

*Vāma Ḍāhāṇa kati Janma mṛtyu khaṭanti /*
*Akṣaya puruṣa, Bhakta bhāve dṛśya /*
*Khāichanti amarikā kaḷapa //5//*

*Ekākṣara Nirveda kṣari āsuchi pada /*
*Brahma nirūpaṇa, Heuchi se sthāna /*
*Bhaṇe bhīma hīna bāi murukha //6//*

# 2

Meditate on the primal and empty house in the spheres
Silence reigns everywhere
And there is a terrible music in the air.

There is a bottomless sea but not a drop of water
It is full of mud of the heart
The four doors enclose a non-existence space
And there is sparkle at each foot-step,
Death has no occasion there.
They are all dressed like kings
But none has worn a fabric.
There is dance in that house but no music is heard.
The nameless, he was at the centre of the dance
A broken language with inadequate metaphor
Cannot recall his splendour
He wipes away all sins and birth and death
Stand at his feet.

No scripture can contemplate his form,
It is immortal and indestructible
The word of the single alphabet is recited
In divine melody
And so says Bhima the inconsequential idiot.

# 3

*Kehu dekhicha ki beni netrare?*
*Vṛddha vayasare atithi veśare*
*Y(j)āuthile ehi pathare (ghoṣā) //0//*

*Mātā Pitā nāhiṃ janma hoile*
*Stana na chumbiṇa ksīra khāile /*
*Bāpa dhana bolī gela karuthili*
*Basithile mora koḷare //1//*

*Baḍhi nāhānti se sāna pilāṭi,*
*Vṛdha hoi' achi y(j)ubā tejaṭi /*
*Gorā na Diśanti kāliā nuhanti*
*Svarūpaka dui madhyare //2//*

*Gharu Kebheṃ nohithile bāhāra,*
*Khajā chūḍā deināhiṃ āhāra /*
*Śujhai gaṇāi nāma deināhim*
*Dhūḷi kheluthile dāṇḍare //3//*

*Rūpa varṇa nāhim jhaḷi diśanti,*
*Pāda pāṇi nāhim chāluachanti /*
*Vastra nāhim vṛkṣa—Bakala pindhanti*
*Āḍabandha nāhiṃ kaṭire //4//*

# 3

Have any of you seen him?
In his old age, dressed as a mendicant, the Master
He passed this way.

He born without parents
Without sucking his mother's breast
He took her milk

I had fondled him in my lap as a little child.
Not that he has grown in age
Only his radiance has now grown brighter.

He is neither fair nor dark
I fed him on nothing and he never went out of his house.
I did not give him a name
Nor asked the astrologers to make his horoscope
He played on the dusty streets.
He is without form and complexion
And yet glows with a brilliant radiance.

*Mote dharitrī ākāśa kahile,*
*Putra y(j)ogīndra heleṇi boile /*
*Brahmāṇḍa uddhāra karibe kumara*
*Ghora kaḷikāḷa y(j)ugare //5//*

*Sarva śubhe y(j)eve bheṭa pāvanti,*
*Koḷe dhari mukhe chumba dianti /*
*Bhaṇe Bhīma Hīna pāmara ajñāna*
*Loḍuchi brahmāṇḍa bhitare //6//*

He is without limbs and yet he moves.
He wears a loin-cloth made of tree-barks.
The earth and the sky inform me
That my son was going to be a sage and
That he would redeem us all.

In this dark *Kaliyuga* if ever I could see him
I would press him to my bosom and kiss him
I am looking for him everywhere
So says Bhima the sinner and devoid of knowledge.

# 4

*Rūpa-rekha nāhim he, Śūnya dehī /*
*Achhi ude hoi //0//*

*Varaṣuchi jaḷa na thāi pavana,*
*Aṇachāśa vayu vahe ghana ghana /*
*Badhuachi jala nāhim nadikūla*
*Ulukāpātadhārā vihi he //1//*

*Jaka Jaka odā Śukhilā hoichi,*
*Kabāṭa na phiṭum netrare diśuchi /*
*Seṭhāre Āśrama anādita brahma*
*Ude asta nāhiṃ tahim he //2//*

*Ni'aiṇṭhā pada niskāma nirveda,*
*Kaḷpaṇā na kari dhara padmapāda /*
*Na vāñcha darśana karāa prasanna*
*Āśā bharasā na dei he //3//*

# 4

He has no shape, no form
The disembodied
See, He has risen.

Windless, it rains and rains
The final breath of life rages fierce
The river swells and surges
It has no embankments
And meteors rain down on the earth.

The sparkling drenched earth is now dry
He is revealed to the eyes
Even before the doors open
There, in the ashrama of the Brahma
Where there is no rising, no setting.

The unuttered word, devoid of desire
Those wordless moments
Do not get perplexed about them but surrender
At his lotus-feet
Don't crave for His sight but please Him
Have no hopes, no expectations.

*Valimāṭi nāhim ubukuchi hrada,*
*Gaṅgājaḷa chāḍi kūpajale gādha /*
*Labhiba mukati na buḍiba jāti*
*Pūrva puṇya a thile pai he //4//*

*Chāi Paḍiachi nāhim vṛkṣamūḷa,*
*Puṣpa kaḍhi nāhim phaḷi' achi phala /*
*Phuṭichi patara dempha nāhim tāra*
*Asādhanā mārge pāi he //5//*

*Pati Patnī rūpe karanti y(j)ugala*
*Indri aṇḍa nāhiṃ pindhanti bakaḷa /*
*Se prabhupayare seva nirantare*
*Bhaṇe Bhīmaṣena Bhoi he //6//*

The lake shimmers. There is no sand or earth
Leaving aside the Ganges you come back to the well
If there is previous birth's good deeds
You will gain deliverance.

There is no tree nor its roots
Yet its shadows lengthen
There are fruits without buds or flowers
The leaves expand without stalks
And he is reached through the path of actionlessness.

They cohabit as husband and wife
They have no organs
And they are dressed up with the barks of trees
At the feet of that Lord worship at all times
So speaks Bhimasen Bhoi.

# 5

*Dāka na Śuṇa kimpāim/*
*Bhava sindhu jaḷe paḍi bhāsu'achhi muhim //O//*

*Ḍāki Ḍāki divā nisî kaṇtha Śukhiy(j)āi /*
*Y( j)esane chātaka pakṣī tesaneka muhim //1//*

*Nirate Āśā karichhi hṛdapadme dhyāyī /*
*Kimpā nirdaya karucha trailokya gosāim //2//*

*Y( j)āra Ājñāre chaluchi Tribhuvana mahī /*
*Bhakatavatsala Bānā achha parā vahi* //3//

*Mūḍha pāpī Jiva-Ātmā Rahichi kimpāi /*
*Ke sahu ete kaṣaṇa martye dehavahi //4//*

*Duhkhī duhkha jaṇāuchi na Śuṇa kimpāim /*
*Alekhaavdhūta bānā ki kariba thāiṃ //5//*

*Muhim pāpiṣṭha pāmara durjana aṭai /*
*Aparādha kṣamākara bole Bhima Bhoi //6//*

# 5

I float, helpless in the occean of life
O' lord why don't you listen to my entreaties?

Calling you day and night ceaselessly
My throat is parched up
I am the swallow waiting for your rain.

All along I have meditated on you in the lotus of the heart
Why are you so cruel O' Lord of the three worlds.

At your command the universe runs its course
And your flag announcing you as the lover of devotees
Flutters in the wind.

Why then is the life of this sinner still there
Who can stand all the anguish in this human body?

# 6

*Latā, vane buli dekha benigoṭi puṣpa go |*
*Prati dine tinipure heuchhanti veśa go //O//*

*Rūpa vṛkṣa mūle chera nāhim ta vikāśa go |*
*Meruku dviguṇe moṭa hoichi prakāśa go //1//*

*Avasante pallabuchi nāhim madhumāsa go*?
*Niti phuṭe niti tuṭe na karai vāsa go //2//*

*Aṇachhāya tarutaḷe karichanti vāsa go |*
*Kaḍharu padile jhaḍi sarve y(j)ibe nāśa go //3//*

*Chāri parakāre rūpavarṇa tāra dṛśya go |*
*Nāhim madhurasa tahim teja tāra viṣa go //4//*

*Chaturtha pakhuḍā duti pākhaḍe vikāśa go |*
*Chārivarṇe raṅga bhṛṅga na y(j)āe tā pāśa go //5//*

*Bhagata janaṅka chitte huai adṛśa go |*
*Kahe Bhīma Bhoi sādhujana ghena vāsa go //6//*

# 6

Walk around in the forest of the creepers
And see those two flowers;
In all the three worlds they are renewed everyday.

The shape of a tree that has no roots
And yet it is double in thickness of mount Meru.

It is no spring; yet the tree flowers
The flowers blossom and fall off
There is no aroma.

Under that shadowless tree they live
When the buds fall off they will all be destroyed
The flowers have four colours
But in place of nectar there is only poison in them.

They have four petals which shine
But the bee of four colours does not even go near.

The flower vanishes in the hearts of the devotees
Says Bhima Bhoi, O' pious men, relish its fragrance.

# 7

*Śunya mandire vihāra, Rūparekha nāhim y(j)āra |*
*Dui pāda na miśai ekapāda dhara dhara //O//*

*Alekha pāṭaṇā pura, Se Ṭhābare tāṅka ghara /*
*Nāhim Śarada uṣuma sādhujane hetukara //1//*

*Nirāmiṣa Niainṭhā piuthile lāge mithā /*
*Adekhā anāme svāda se sudhā dhāra //2//*

*Dekhi tā chaṭaka chāli. Jñānī maruchanti bhāli |*
*Chakṣu maṭakaru vega bijuḷiru ati khara //3//*

*Tāhāṅku y(j)ebaṇa jana, Nirveda kare darśana |*
*Akhaṇḍita brahme līna janma maranaru pāra //4//*

*Kriyā Karme Nalāgai, Sādhu Saṅga kale pāi |*
*Dīkṣā tā niskāma dharma bhajana eka akṣara //5//*

*Y(j)eumthāre brahma achhi, Ude asta nāhiṃ kichhi /*
*Kahe Bhīma arakṣita nigama se andhakāra //6//*

# 7

He revels in the temple of the void
The one without shape and form
No, yau can never see his two feet
but do submit to the One.

His house is in that nameless unknown realm
O' wisemen remember, there
Neither it is too warm, nor too cold.

The untested, unseen and unnamable nectar
Has none equal to it in sweetness and relish
The wisemen keep on wondering at his deceptive gait
Fleeting as the twinkle of an eye
And sharper than lightning.

Whoever is lucky to visualise him in silence
Crosses the ocean of birth and death
And finally merges into the undivided Brahma.

All your actions, the karma are of no avail
But the company of saintly persons helps
If you accept the tenet of desirelessness
And meditate on its single letter.

Where the Brahma reigns
There is no rising, no setting
And so speaks the hapless Bhima
That darkness is truly impenetrable.

## Extracts from the 15th Boli

*Sthāvaru jaṅgama kīṭaru pataṅga chāhim dele anusari /*
*Sakaḷa ghāṭare pūri samānare nohe sāna baḍa kari //1//*

*Bhāvaku nikaṭa abhāve abheṭa bhaktabhāve parāvaśa /*
*E mora guhāri na śuṇa ki kari dhari'acha kewn roṣa //2//*

*Vacanaku eḍi bhagatiku chhāḍi anyare ki baḍhigali /*
*Prabhu Srīchhāmure sevivā payare ki ki aparādha kali //3//*

*Na Śuṇilā, pan heu'achha Hari Deu'achha daṇḍa sajā /*
*Pākharu antara kari nirantara dayāre he'ucha dujā//4//*

* * *

*Chira kāḷa Raṅka Āśā mo aneka janma janmāntaru duhkhī /*
*Prāpata nidhiki sakaḷa siddhiki aprastuta yuga dekhi //6//*

* * *

*Gamibi ki yoge bhajibi ki mārge sada buddhi jñāna nāhim/*
*Nohe sādhu santha nuhai paṇḍita prakṛta atithi muhim //8//*
*Āpe maṇḍi pāra āpe khaṇḍipāra vāñchāphale ude ripu /*
*Vichāruchi chitte hṛdayaragate prabhu mora bala vapu //9//*

*Mahāprabhu hoi karttā pada bahi sakala he'uchi vṛthā /*
*Piṇḍa dei prabhu maṇḍa na de'ucha e puṇi kevaṇa kathā //10/*

## *Extracts from the 15th Boli*

From the immovable to the movable, from insects to birds, wherever I look, I find you inhabiting all the beings. One cannot consider any one small or big. It is said you are near to those who call you with love. You are invisible to those who have no love and that you are ever subservient to the *bhakta's* love. Why then you do not listen to my supplications O'Lord? Why are you angry with me? Have I given up my devotion to you and got enmessed in other things? What all sins have I committed while worshipping your divine feet? You punish me and appear as if you do not listen to my supplication. You drive me away from your side negative your own compassion.

* * *

Forever I crave and pine for you. My hopes are many. I am anguished and miserable through numerous births. And in this age I am unprepared for receiving the *siddhis* and the graces.

* * *

Through what yoga should I move? Through which path should I worship? I do not have that true knowledge, I am no seer, no religious person, I am no pundit. But I am your guest. You may decorate me, you may annihilate me. The enemies are around. In my heart, in my soul, I only realise that the Lord is my strength. You are the Lord and you are the subject of all actions and still everything goes in vain for me! You have given the life and yet you do not give a few morsels in the mouth. What justice is this?

## Extracts from the 22nd Boli

*Buluthāi vane niti pratidine vatsāku saṃgate gheni /*
*Kṣudhā trṣā kale jivanavikale piu' thāi jhara pāṇt //1//*

*Ākāśaku chāhim manare bhāḷai karu' thāi pāñcha heja /*
*Veḷa hoināhiṃ yivi muṃ ki hoi na miḷiva pāṇi peja //2//*

*Dhanya e piṇḍa na hoi khaṇḍa khaṇḍa paḍi achhi yete māḍa /*
*Gāḷidvandva pacha āḍaku pakāi hṛda karithāi dṛḍha* //3//

*Luha nāhiṃ rakta bahuthāi mora śrihaste diai pochhi /*
*Kehi na jāṇanti śriguru jāṇanti yete kaṣṭa paī' achhi //4//*

*Se samayakathā mane kale cintā karati kāṭuchi piṇḍa /*
*Uṭhu'achhi krodha hoi gada gada bukure paḍuchhi kāṇḍa //5//*
*Vāra thāru tera chauda varaṣa bahigalā ehirūpe /*
*Mana jāṇuachhi antara vedana dahiyya hoi santāpe //6//*

****

*Śunyaku anāi rahiachi muhiṃ ki rūpe dharivi debī /*
*Keuṃ ḍāla dhari pāri hoi yivi hāta goḍa paunāhiṃ* //11//

****

*Janani udara gopa madhupura pāśora na yāe chittu /*
*Mātṛ garbhagate pāṭha paḍhithili ṭike tike achhi hetu //19//*

*Satyare marivi satyare tarivi ehi ājñā mote heu /*
*Kahe Bhīma Bhoi e mṛtyumaṇḍale yaśa apayaśa thāu //20//*

## *Extracts from the 22nd Boli*

I roam the forest everyday with the cattle. When afflicted with intense hunger and thirst, I take water from the hill streams to save life. Looking at the sky, my mind reflects it is not yet time and why should I get back. For there would be no water, not even a morsel. And this life, why does not it go in pieces, but suffers all the chastisements! *And* yet I console and stabilize my heart turning away from all the abuses and tensions. It is not tears but blood that comes out from my eyes and I wipe it with my hands. Nobody else knows. It is only my *Sriguru* who knows all the miseries and when I recollect those times, my heart is rent with anguish. An arrow smites my heart and anger rages as a flame. This is how my years from twelfth to the fourteenth passed away. Only my mind knows what hardships, what anguishes have burnt me.

* * *

I look at the emptiness and do not know how I will continue my life. Which branch shall I hold on to. How will I cross the river of suffering, I do not know.

* * *

The Gopa and the Madhupur of my mother's womb have not vanished from my mind. I recollect the little lessons I learnt there. In truth I will die, through truth I will save myself. Let this be ordained to me, so says Bhima Bhoi. All the good and bad deeds remain only in this sphere of death.

## Extracts from the 27th Boli

*Sampatti vipatti mukati durgati bhiāṇa karichha yoḍi /*
*Pāpa duhkha bhāra ke tumbha bahiba pādataḷe thāu paḍi \\4*

*Vije kariachha kimpā na Bujhuchha palāi pasîvi kāhiṃ /*
*Arji pāpa bhārā karibi pasarā pādataḷe debi thoi //5//*

*Śaraṇa vāñchita kāndi kandi bhakta gaḍi galeṇi sakala /*
*Doṣa aparādha kṣamā kari guru jāgratare pratipāla //6//*

*Prāṇiṅka ārata duhkha apramita dekhu dekhu kevā sahu /*
*Mo' jivana pachhe narke paḍithāu jagata uddhāra heu \\7*

## *Extracts from the 27th Boli*

Weal and woe, salvation and suffering, these twins are your creation. Who can carry the burden of the sins? Let them stay at your feet. There you have risen and why don't you realise that I cannot run away anywhere. Earning all the sins I will only put them in a basket and place it at your feet. Seeking shelter in you all the *bhaktas* are rolling on the earth. Forgive them the sins and O Guru bring them up. Boundless is the anguish and misery of the living. Who can see it and tolerate? Let my soul be condemned to hell but let the universe be redeemed.

## Extracts from the 75th Boli

*Aruṇa tarāsa paḍile yesana andhakāra yāe phāṭi /*
*Sehipari prabhu jñāna khaḍagare pātaka pakā'a kāti //1//*

*Niśire chandramā udaya hoile rajanī kare ālua /*
*Sehi parakāra pāpabhārā mora nivāraṇa kari nia //2//*

*Sarpāghāta hele guṇika yesana viṣare pakānti pada /*
*Aṅgare mora pāpalatā chāṭichi guruvākye pāu hada \\3*

*Sannipāta ghoṭithile vaidyamāne melanti viṣāna baḍi /*
*Maḷu aṅgare samudra prāye jala śukhai tā teja paḍi //4//*

*Sehipari mora aṅgaru nivāra pāpa duhkha sāgaraku /*
*Jūāna mauṣadhi dei bhala kara na thāu kāḷa kāḷaku //5//*

*Rajaka yesane maḷia vasana ujjvaḷa karai tuṭhe /*
*Se rūpe mote ujjvaḷa kara prabhu yeuṃ pāpa achhi ghaṭe//6//*

*Suvarṇa yesane anaḷe dohile rūpa tā diśai jhaḷi /*
*Tesana mote brahma anaḷe jāḷa chhāḍi yāu pāpa maḷi //7//*

## *Extracts from the 75th Boli*

Just as darkness cracks up when the Sun's rays fall on it, similarly O' Lord cut away my sins with the sword of knowledge. Just as when the moon rises at night, light shines everywhere; similarly abolish the burden of my sin O' Lord. Just as with the charmed words of the snake-charmer, snake-bite is healed, similarly do away with the creepers of sin which have entwined me. As the Vaidyas with their poisonous medicines remove the causes of approaching death in the patient and the oceans of water in the patient's body vanish in no time, similarly O' Lord let the ocean of sin vanish from within me and let the medicine of knowledge cure me forever. Just as the washerman cleans the soiled clothes and makes them bright, brighten me O*'* Lord by removing the dirt of sin. Just as gold shines brighter when burnt in fire, similarly O' Lord remove all the dirts of sin from me by burning me in the fire of *Brahman.*

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# Glossary of Non-English Words Frequently Used in Bhima Bhoi's Works and the Literature on Satya Mahima Dharma

| | |
|---|---|
| *Anadi* | Eternal. |
| *Akhanda* | Undivided indivisible. |
| *Alekha* | Unwritten, indescribable. |
| *Alekha Brahma* | |
| *Alekha Mahima* | |
| *Alekha Param Brahman* | Unwritten Supreme Lord. |
| *Alekha Prabhu* | |
| *Abhaya Mandala* | The sphere of Brahman which dispels fear. |
| *Bairagi* | One who has renounced the World and has not accepted the sanyasa order. |
| *Balkala* | Bark of Kumbhi tree (careya arborea). |
| *Bhajana* | Devotional song. |
| *Bhakta* | Devotee. |
| *Jnana Bhakti Yoga* | Yoga of pure self-knowledge and |

| | |
|---|---|
| | devotion. |
| *Brahman* | Lord. |
| *Brahmabadhuta* | A wandering monk surrendered to the Supreme Lord. |
| *Brahma sadhana* | Practice of surrendering to the Supreme Lord. |
| *Cautisa* | A poem consisting of 34 couplets beginning with the 34 letters of the alphabet from ka to ksha. |
| *Dhuni* | Sacred fire devoted to the Supreme Lord. |
| *Dhunimandir* | Temple where dhuni is burnt. |
| *Guru* | The great teacher—The Supreme Lord of the Universe. |
| *Jagata* | World. |
| *Janana* | Devotional song of supplication. |
| *Karuna* | Compassion. |
| *Khanjani* | Tambourine. |
| *Mahima* | Glory, The Supreme Lord of the Universe, Founder of the Mahima Dharma. |
| *Mahima Dharma* | The faith founded by Mahima Swami. |
| *Mahimagadi* | The monastery located at Joranda in the district of Dhenkanal in Orissa. |
| *Mahima Mahaprabhu*<br>*Mahima Prabhu*<br>*Mahima Swami*<br>*Mahima Gosain* | The Supreme Lord of the Universe. |
| *Nirakara* | Formless. |
| *Niranjana* | Pure or without support, the |

| | |
|---|---|
| | blemishless. |
| *Param Brahma* | Supreme Lord. |
| *Prabuddha* | Wisdom incarnate, the Awakened. |
| *Prabuddha Guru Mahima Swami* | Supreme Lord, Founder of Mahima Dharma. |
| *Sadhaka* | Practitioner. |
| *Sadhana* | Practice. |
| *Sadhu* | The holy man, ascetic. |
| *Sadhu bhaktas* | Holy devotees. |
| *Sanyasi* | Monk, ascetic, mendicant. |
| *Siddha* | Self-realised, perfect. |
| *Sunya* | Void. |
| *Tungi* | One-roomed house meant for parasanyasis. It is also known as Mahimashrama, Alekha Tungi and Alekha Abdhuta Tungi. |

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| *Ilango Adigal* | M. Varadarajan |
| *Iswarchandra Vidyasagar* | Hiranmay Banerji |
| *Jaishankar Prasad* | Ramesh Chandra Shah |
| *Jayadeva* | Suniti Kumar Chatterji |
| *Jibananandadas* | Chidananda Dasgupta |
| *Jnanadeva* | P.Y. Deshpande |
| *Kabir* | Prabhakar Machwe |
| *Kalhana* | Somnath Dhar |
| *Kamban* | S. Maharajan |
| *Kazi Nazrul Islam* | Gopal Haldar |
| *Keshavsut* | Prabhakar Machwe |
| *Kshetrayya* | B. Rajanikanta Rao |
| *Kumaran Asan* | K.M. George |
| *Lakshminath Bezbaroa* | Hem Barua |
| *Mahakavi Ulloor* | Sukumar Azhicode |
| *Maharshi Devendranath Tagore* | Narayan Chaudhuri |
| *Manik Bandyopadhyay* | Saroj Mohan Mitra |
| *Manikkavachakar* | G. Vanmikanathan |
| *Manilal Dvivedi* | Dhirubhai Thaker |
| *Manmohan Ghose* | Lotika Ghosc |
| *Meghani* | V.J. Trivedi |
| *Michael Madhusudan Dutt* | Amalendu Bose |
| *Mir Taqi Mir* | Ish Kumar |
| *Mira Bai* | Usha S. Nilsson |
| *Nammalvar* | A. Srinivasa Raghavan |
| *Nanalal* | U.M. Maniar |
| *Narmadashankar* | Gulabdas Broker |

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|---|---|
| *Nazir Akbarabadi* | Mohammad Hasan |
| *N,C. Kelkar* | R.M. Gole |
| *Panje Mangesh Rau* | V. Sitaramiah |
| *Pothana* | D. Venkatavadhani |
| *Pramatha Chaudhuri* | Arun Kumar Mukhopadhyay |
| *Prem Chand* | Prakash Chandra Gupta |
| *Radhanath Ray* | Gopinath Mohanty |
| *Rahul Sankrityayan* | Prabhakar Machwe |
| *Raja Rammohun Roy* | Saumyendranath Tagore |
| *Ramalingar* | G. Vanmikanathan |
| *Sachal Sarmast* | K.B. Advani |
| *Sarala Dasa* | Krishna Chandra Panigrahi |
| *Sarojini Naidu* | Padmini Sengupta |
| *Shah Latif* | K.B. Advani |
| *Sri Aurobindo* | Manoj Das |
| *Sudhindranath Datta* | Amiya Dev |
| *Surdas* | Usha S. Nilsson |
| *Surya Mall Mishran* | Vishnu Dutt Sharma |
| *Swami Brahmanand Tirth* | J.C. Sathe |
| *Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay* | Mahasveta Devi |
| *Tiruvalluvar* | S. Maharajan |
| *Tom Dutt* | Padmini Sengupta |
| *Tukaram* | Bhalchandra Nemade |
| *Tyagaraja* | V. Raghavan |
| *Vallathol Narayana Menon* | B. Hradayakumari |
| *Vedam Venkataraya Sastry* | Vedam Venkataraya Sastry (Junior) |
| *Veeresalingam* | V.R. Narla |
| *Vemana* | V.R. Narla |
| *Vidyapati* | Ramanath Jha |
| *Vrindavanlal Verma* | Rajeev Saxena |
| *Zinda Kaul* | A.N. Raina |